



## Social Media Resource Guide

The Department of Information Resources (DIR) collaborated with 34 state agencies and institutions of higher education (referred to as “agencies”) to develop a resource guide regarding the use of social media tools for official state business. There are three sections in the Social Media Resource Guide (Resource Guide):

- Strategy – what to do before creating a social media account
- Guidelines – how to stay compliant with existing rules, statutes and policies
- Content – how to create valuable content for customers

Each section includes practical guidance to help agencies successfully implement interactive, web-based communications with customers.

The Resource Guide presents recommendations and guidelines, not formal requirements for agencies in their use of social media. Given the variation across agencies in terms of missions, customers, organizational structures, size, and resources, not all sections in the Resource Guide may apply to every agency. While the Resource Guide was designed for agencies, most of the principles and material in it are applicable for all organizations, public or private. If you have comments or suggestions to help improve the Resource Guide or if there are areas in need of an update, please contact [socialmedia@dir.texas.gov](mailto:socialmedia@dir.texas.gov).

### Why Social Media?

Citizens, businesses, news outlets, and those deeply involved in civic, political, military, and educational service are increasingly interacting with and through social media tools. Blogs and micro blogs, video, online communities, and other social networking outlets are now a primary information and communications source for a growing segment of the population.

### Benefits of Social Media

As mentioned in the 2012–2016 State Strategic Plan, there are several tangible benefits of using social media. Through appropriate use of social media, agencies have:

- Increased traffic to websites and adoption of online services
- Communicated with the public in a better, faster, and cheaper manner
- Promoted information that would not have reached the public through traditional channels
- Provided a moderated forum for citizens to constructively discuss important issues
- Turned negative complaints into positive experiences with timely customer service
- Increased outreach and brand recognition to stakeholders

As online conversations increase, the question of whether or not social media is appropriate for government use is being answered with a resounding “Yes!” by both government and the public.

However, before an organization becomes an active participant, there are several considerations that should be addressed. Those key issues are outlined in this guide.

## Who Developed this Guide?

The Social Media Resource Guide is a collaborative project developed by a workgroup comprising numerous Texas state agencies and institutions of higher education. Members of the workgroup represented a diverse collection of subject-matter areas:

- Communications
- Web development
- Accessibility
- Records management
- Legal
- Marketing/business development
- Security
- Privacy
- Human resources

DIR would like to thank the following agencies for their participation in the development of the Social Media Resource Guide:

- |                                                             |                                                            |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| • Employees Retirement System of Texas                      | • Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation             |
| • Office of Consumer Credit Commissioner                    | • Texas Department of Motor Vehicles                       |
| • Office of Injured Employee Counsel                        | • Texas Department of Public Safety                        |
| • Office of the Governor                                    | • Texas Department of State Health Services                |
| • Railroad Commission of Texas                              | • Texas Health and Human Services Commission               |
| • Stephen F. Austin State University                        | • Texas Lottery Commission                                 |
| • Sunset Advisory Commission                                | • Texas Office of Court Administration                     |
| • Teachers Retirement System of Texas                       | • Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired         |
| • Texas A&M University                                      | • Texas State Library and Archives Commission              |
| • Texas Alcohol and Beverage Commission                     | • Texas State University                                   |
| • Texas Animal Health Commission                            | • Texas Water Development Board                            |
| • Texas Commission on Environmental Quality                 | • Texas Workforce Commission                               |
| • Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts                      | • Texas Juvenile Justice Commission                        |
| • Texas Department of Aging and Disability Services         | • Texas.gov                                                |
| • Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services | • University of Houston                                    |
| • Texas Department of Family and Protective Services        | • University of North Texas                                |
| • Texas Department of Insurance                             | • University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio |



## Social Media Strategy

Quick Links – [Strategy](#) | [Start Small](#) | [Popular Sites](#) | [Business Case](#) | [Governance](#)

### Social Media Begins with Strategy

As is the case with any project, the likelihood of success increases significantly when an organization starts with a focused strategy with expected or desired outcomes. Social media presents many challenges not found with traditional information technology or communication projects, including the following:

- The variety of affected topics, such as web, communications, legal, accessibility, security, privacy, human resources, and record management
- The rapidly evolving nature of the industry
- A certain lack of control over engagements with the public
- The lack of federal and state laws providing direct regulation of the medium

Despite these challenges, one point remains clear: DIR sees value in social media and encourages agencies to evaluate social media applications for opportunities to support program goals. As mentioned in the 2012–2016 State Strategic Plan, “Before an agency enters into social media, many business considerations and strategic planning elements must be addressed to increase the likelihood of success.”

Although there are agencies that have successfully used social media without a well-documented strategy, there are increased risks with this approach. Some risks include:

- Not knowing how to respond to certain types of posts or inquiries
- Inadvertent posting of ill-advised content
- Inconsistent internal processes or lack of governance
- Lack of coordination across business areas
- Expending significant time and effort with little return
- Loss of institutional knowledge when critical employees change

A well-planned social media strategy not only mitigates these risks, but provides the agency a roadmap toward continued growth and success.

### Start Small

If an organization does not have a social media subject-matter expert, invest some time to learn the basics:

- Establish personal accounts on popular social media sites
- Study the activities and approaches of other similarly situated agencies, both in Texas and other states
- Look around social media sites to learn the culture, appropriate behavior, best practices, etc.

Chances are, some agency employees are familiar with social media through personal use. Look for expertise not only from staff members who handle complementary subject matter (the communication expert, marketing manager, security officer, or web developer), but from others across the agency. Send out an agency-wide communication asking proficient users for input; some may emerge from less likely areas. While social media for personal use is applied differently than for official agency use, these experts could be valuable in helping an organization appreciate the basic language and culture of various social media sites. Experienced users can help an agency successfully navigate specific social media environments to reach an intended audience.

Once the organization is ready to establish a presence, start with one or two social media sites. Begin by posting a few times a week. It takes time and resources to build up a social media presence; don't get overwhelmed by trying too many approaches at once.

## Popular Social Media Sites

Which social media sites should an agency use? The answer depends on the social media goals, which again, should be tied to an agency's strategy. The table below outlines plausible agency social media goals and the tools best suited to achieving those goals. Details about social media goals and strategies are discussed in the next section.

| Goal                                                           | Twitter | Facebook | YouTube | Blogs  | Flickr | LinkedIn |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|---------|----------|---------|--------|--------|----------|
| Improve customer service                                       | High    | High     | Low     | Medium | Low    | Medium   |
| Supplement content to official agency website                  | Medium  | Medium   | Medium  | High   | Medium | Low      |
| Solicit and gather feedback                                    | Medium  | High     | Low     | High   | Low    | High     |
| Keep customers informed of the latest news and events          | High    | High     | Medium  | High   | Low    | High     |
| Educate customers about how to perform certain technical tasks | Low     | Low      | High    | High   | Medium | Low      |
| Recruit and retain staff                                       | High    | High     | Medium  | Medium | Medium | High     |

## Develop the Business Case

The first step in creating a social media strategy is to develop a business case. Agencies must answer the question of "Why social media?" in a very specific and thorough way. There is no one-size-fits-all solution that will work for every organization. A small regulatory agency for a highly specialized profession will use social media differently than a large public university with 30,000 students.

Developing a business case will help agencies optimize their social media presence. At a minimum, a business case should address:

- How strategy aligns with existing agency mission
- Program goals, objectives, and performance measures
- Roles and responsibilities
- Internal governance of the social media program

- Costs, including staff resources

For more detail about business cases for IT projects in general, consult the Business Case portion of the Texas Project Delivery Framework.

### Align with the Mission

Social media applications are communication tools. A strategic, structured approach to social media should be aligned with the agency or program mission and consistent with other agency communication efforts, such as web, print materials, media outreach, and press releases. Examples of missions for various agencies and programs are presented in the table below.

| Agency or Program                               | Mission                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Texas Department of Information Resources (DIR) | DIR's mission is to provide technology leadership, solutions, and value to Texas state government, education, and local government entities to enable and facilitate the fulfillment of their core missions.                                                              |
| Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD)      | [TPWD's mission is] to manage and conserve the natural and cultural resources of Texas and to provide hunting, fishing and outdoor recreation opportunities for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.                                                  |
| Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC)     | [HHSC] provides leadership and direction, and fosters the spirit of innovation needed to achieve an efficient and effective health and human services system for Texans.                                                                                                  |
| 2-1-1 Texas (an HHSC program)                   | [2-1-1 Texas is] committed to helping Texas citizens connect with the services they need. Whether by phone or internet, our goal is to present accurate, well-organized and easy-to-find information from over 60,000 state and local health and human services programs. |
| Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation    | Our mission is to maintain public trust while promoting the public's safety and ensuring a fair and competitive business environment for our regulated industries.                                                                                                        |

The mission statement of an agency or program area naturally drives the content for its communications. For social media, it's a matter of determining how the highly interactive, timely, informal, and engaging content will also support the agency's mission. Keeping the mission in mind helps the agency stay focused in its social media efforts.

For example, the mission statement for the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department uses words like "recreational opportunities" and "enjoyment," which evoke positive, fun, and pleasurable feelings. It's no wonder they post pictures on their Facebook page of baby turtles returning to the Gulf, or have an album called "Send us your State Park swimming pictures."

On the other hand, the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation is about "trust, public safety and a competitive business environment." On their Twitter feed, they post topics such as rule updates, application deadlines, draft documents for public review, tips for new customers—all without mentioning a specific vendor. All of their Twitter updates align perfectly with furthering their mission.

## Develop Goals

Agencies using social media should have targeted goals that align with their business needs. Understand the mission, related goals, and the types of messages already used. Next, develop new message content and identify the audiences targeted to determine the specific use for social media.

Try this exercise to help align social media efforts with goals that support the agency mission.

We want to \_\_\_\_\_ (insert social media idea)  
so our \_\_\_\_\_ (insert audience)  
will \_\_\_\_\_ (insert action for audience)  
which will result in \_\_\_\_\_ (insert agency's desired outcome)

For example:

We want to *post YouTube videos* so our *aid applicants* will *have a better understanding of the application process* which will result in *fewer mistakes on applications requiring staff follow-up*.

Or,

We want to *create a Facebook page* so our *customers* will *interact with us* which will result in *more suggestions on service improvement*.

## Measure Success

Once goals are identified, agencies should establish performance measures to gauge results of the agency's social media strategy. Without continued evaluation and assessment, it is difficult to indicate if goals are being met.

Many social media sites have simple measurements such as

- YouTube page views
- Number of Facebook fans
- Number of Twitter followers
- Analytics on a WordPress blog

While these numbers may provide objective measurements on the use of social media tools, they alone might not be sufficient to determine the overall value of your agency's social media strategy. Measurements need to be specifically and directly tied to an agency's social media goals.

Consider this example:

In July 2011, the City of Los Angeles had to close a ten-mile stretch of a major highway for 53 hours (dubbed "Carmegeddon"). Twitter and Facebook were used widely to spread the word and find alternative travel solutions. The number of tweets on the topic is a great output measure, but the number of cars on the road (or lack thereof) after the Twitter and Facebook posts was a better outcome measure. [Learn more](#).

Here are some examples of specific metrics or performance measures that can more accurately determine success. The key to establishing useful performance measures is that they tie to an outcome that is outside the social media efforts.

- Decreased volume in other contact channels such as call center or email inquiries
- Increased traffic to an agency website—many agency website analytics have the ability to record whether a visit came from a particular social media website
- Increased participation at agency-sponsored activities
- Increased numbers of people applying for a particular service

Building up an agency's social media presence to have this kind of impact takes time. Unless the agency is a well-known brand with a large audience (e.g., The University of Texas, TxDOT, or DPS), it will take time to build a community that can be influenced to take action through social media efforts. Moreover, to ensure initial and ongoing success, an agency must establish performance measures that will allow for the monitoring of an agency's social media strategy and allow for adjustments, as necessary.

Correlating social media efforts to real world behavior is not simple, especially if the social media activity is limited to a third-party's website. However, if some of the activity is integrated into the agency's own website, there may be additional tools to help analyze and quantify the impact of each social media posting. This article from *Social Media Examiner* gives [four detailed ways to measure success](#).

## Roles and Responsibilities

Planning and executing a social media strategy involves different players assuming various roles. Here are some key roles in developing, implementing, and growing a social media initiative.

| Role                      | Descriptions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Executive Sponsor         | Social media strategies and activity should have executive approval. The sponsor may also lead a workgroup to develop internal policies, procedures, and other matters related to governance. The sponsor also helps to ensure goals are tied to the agency's mission.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Accessibility Coordinator | The Accessibility Coordinator ensures the electronic information resources are accessible to all internal and external users. Accessibility is not only for public-facing social media applications, but also for all internal applications, regardless of the abilities of internal users. Texas state agencies and institutions of higher education are bound by <a href="#">1 TAC 206</a> and <a href="#">1 TAC 213</a> . Refer to the Accessibility section in the Social Media Guidelines for how these rules apply to social media. |
| Communications Specialist | As described earlier, social media strategy must be aligned with the agency's mission. The communications specialist might also develop and/or coordinate a plan for promoting the social media sites.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Policy/Legal Counsel      | Legal counsel helps to ensure compliance with contracts, laws, rules, and policies. Involve the legal team in every step of the process. Make sure that activities are consistent with agency policy and state and federal laws.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |

| Role                                            | Descriptions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|-------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Records Manager                                 | The Records Manager determines the responsibility regarding retention of social media content. Currently, there is no statewide retention schedule specifically addressing social media records. Each agency must determine how it will comply with general state record management requirements. See the Records Retention section of the Social Media Guidelines for more details.                                                               |
| Social Media Activity Monitor                   | Many social media applications allow for comments, oftentimes in an uncontrolled environment. Agencies should periodically monitor to ensure customer needs are being met and social media initiatives are achieving the desired engagement.                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Content Manager/Director                        | The Content Manager/Director determines what type of content is appropriate based on a unified social media strategy. See the Content Section of the Social Media Resource Guide for examples.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Content Writers/Sources                         | These are agency staff who help supply the content. Sourcing content directly from program areas ensures content is relevant, accurate, and up-to-date. These personnel also notify the program area that it will be featured in an upcoming post.                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Technical Support/ Other Subject-Matter Experts | Since social media touches so many subjects, a technical expert is needed to ensure compliance and interpret the application of policy. For example, a Human Resources specialist may develop employee use policies; security personnel will guide the application of security policy and guidelines to social media; technology support staff will approve social media management software and manage access to third-party sites for employees. |

## Governance

### Gain Executive Buy-in

Social media initiatives should not be created and implemented in a vacuum; there should be an organized effort that includes executive management. There have been cases in both the public and private sectors where employees have launched social media accounts without using proper administrative approval, leading to inaccurate or unauthorized representation, improper customer engagement, employee discipline, and occasional legal actions.

It is impossible to implement a successful and sustainable social media program without the approval from executive management. Propose the social media strategy and the overall business case to executive management to solicit commitment to using social media as an official communication channel.

Here are some topics to cover during a social media presentation with executives. Be specific and provide examples of the following to support your message:

- Demonstrate current knowledge of the industry
- Gain support from internal subject-matter experts in the areas of accessibility, records management, security, human resources, etc.



- Identify goals and measures that will benefit the agency and present its value
- Outline how the agency will mitigate potential risks in an uncontrolled environment (especially dealing with negative content)
- Get legal counsel involved early and show how social media efforts will comply with existing laws, rules, and regulations
- Show value demonstrated by other Texas agencies or similar agencies in other states
- Propose a detailed plan for initiation, maintenance, and growth

## Start a Workgroup

Due to the various subject-matter experts that need to be involved, many agencies establish workgroups to develop a social media strategy.

While the overriding purpose of the workgroup is to ensure your agency's social media strategy accomplishes its goals, the following topics are essential elements for a workgroup to consider:

- How to develop and approve content before it gets posted
- Guidelines for when, how, and in what timeframes to respond to inquiries
- How much time to spend managing the social media applications
- How to manage the account after work hours
- Which employees will be allowed to post and by what devices
- When to explore new social media tools
- Who to connect to or follow
- Whether and how employees may engage through their personal accounts
- How to train and keep employees updated on the latest industry developments

## Account Management

One question common to agencies is: Should we have one social media account or multiple accounts? For agencies that are very specific in nature and have interrelated program areas, one account is likely to be sufficient. For agencies that have very diverse programs with different goals, activities, and customer bases, multiple accounts might make it easier to streamline messaging and facilitate reaching different audiences. If the agency chooses to operate multiple social media accounts, consider assigning each account to a different content supplier.

The table below illustrates some factors to consider before deciding to use one or multiple accounts.

| Single Accounts                                                                        | Multiple Accounts                                                                |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Easier to manage                                                                       | Messages can be very specific and more relevant to audience                      |
| Centralized message                                                                    | Might be easier for customer service                                             |
| Easier for audience to find/identify                                                   | Might require more resources                                                     |
| Good for organizations with fewer programs and/or similar customers with similar needs | Good for organization with disparate programs that have different customer bases |

## Stay Current

It's important to stay current on the ever-evolving social media landscape, not for the purpose of engaging every new social media site available, but to stay ahead on the latest developments in the industry and enhance the skills needed to use evolving tools. There are many online resources dedicated to the latest social media trends and drivers.

Here are some popular websites about social media and technology:

- [www.mashable.com](http://www.mashable.com)
- [www.techcrunch.com](http://www.techcrunch.com)
- [www.socialmediaexaminer.com](http://www.socialmediaexaminer.com)
- [www.howto.gov/social-media](http://www.howto.gov/social-media)



## Social Media Guidelines

### Definitions

#### Social Media Tool

A software system or service provided via the Internet used to communicate and share information between people, especially affinity groups of people such as customers or constituents, where customers, constituents, or the general public are the primary creators of the information content. Examples include Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr, and GetSatisfaction.

#### Internal Social Media Tool

A Social Media Tool that is owned, funded or operated by or for a state agency. Internal Social Media Tools are considered “state websites” and must follow all requirements of 1 TAC 206. Examples include agency-hosted or externally-hosted and agency-dedicated instances of wikis, blogs, and learning management systems.

#### External Social Media Tool

A Social Media Tool built, owned, funded or operated by a commercial enterprise or nonprofit consortium that is intended for widespread use in a variety of contexts by the public users. Examples include Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Flickr

#### Public Social Media Policy

A public-facing document published by an agency that notifies the public of the policy areas that impact the public's use of agency Social Media Tools.

#### Accessibility

Usability of a product, service, environment, or facility by people with the widest range of capabilities.

#### Personally Identifiable Information

Personally identifiable information is defined in [Texas Business and Commerce Code \(TBCC\) Chapter 521](#) as “information that alone or in conjunction with other information identifies an individual.”

This includes an individual's

- (a) name, social security number, date of birth, or government-issued identification number;
- (b) mother's maiden name;
- (c) unique biometric data including the individual's fingerprint, voice print, or retina or iris image;
- (d) unique electronic identification number, address, or routing code; and
- (e) telecommunication access device as defined by Section 32.51, Penal Code.

### Sensitive Personal Information

There are two categories of sensitive personal information defined in [Texas Business and Commerce Code \(TBCC\) Chapter 521](#):

- (a) an individual's first name or first initial and last name in combination with any one or more of the following items:
  - (1) social security number;
  - (2) driver's license number or government-issued identification number; or
  - (3) account number or credit or debit card number in combination with any required security code, access code, or password that would permit access to an individual's financial account; or
- (b) information that identifies an individual and relates to
  - (1) the physical or mental health or condition of the individual;
  - (2) the provision of health care to the individual; or
  - (3) payment for the provision of health care to the individual.

### Purpose

The purpose of the Social Media Guidelines is to provide guidance for agencies and institutions of higher education regarding the use of Social Media Tools for official state business. These guidelines serve as a compendium of state law, Texas Administrative Code (TAC), and federal law that apply to the use of social media by Texas agencies. Although there is currently no Texas Administrative Rule that directly addresses the use of social media, there are existing rules associated with electronic information resources (EIR) that may affect the use of Social Media Tools by state agencies.

While agencies are required to comply with established rules and laws (as is indicated throughout document as "must"); this document contains additional guidance and best practices, by which compliance is encouraged by the Department of Information Resources (DIR) to maximize the benefit of social media while minimizing risk to the state (as is indicated by "should").

This document is not meant to replace current agency-specific social media policies, strategies, or guidelines; but rather, the document should be used as a reference and where appropriate, supplement an agency's current social media policy.

DIR collaborated with subject-matter experts from agencies throughout the state to produce these guidelines. Due to the evolving nature of social media, the content in this document may require periodic updates. If you have suggestions for this document, contact [socialmedia@dir.texas.gov](mailto:socialmedia@dir.texas.gov).

### Scope

The guidelines apply to the use of social media for conducting official state business by Texas state agencies and institutions of higher education. The scope of the guidelines does not govern an employee's personal use of social media. Policies regarding an employee's personal use of social media are governed by each agency's human resource policies.

For the purpose of these guidelines, a Social Media Tool includes both tools deployed and operated by an agency (Internal Social Media Tool) and official agency social media web pages hosted on a third-party website (External Social Media Tool).

In 1 TAC 206: State Websites, a state website is defined as a “website that is connected to the Internet and is owned, funded, or operated by or for a state agency or institution of higher education, including key public entry points.” While an External Social Media Tool developed and hosted by a third party is not within the scope of 1 TAC 206, an Internal Social Media Tool must adhere to 1 TAC 206. External Social Media Tools should adhere to the requirements of 1 TAC 206 to the extent possible.

## Policy Considerations

The decision to use Social Media Tools is a business decision based on an agency’s specific needs and the appropriate scope of its use.

Certain sections in the Social Media Guidelines are internal to an agency (such as Security and Employee Use) while other sections should be communicated to the public. An agency should publish a public-facing document (Public Social Media Policy) that notifies the public of the policy areas that impact the public’s use of agency Social Media Tools. At a minimum, the Public Social Media Policy should address the following:

- Privacy notification
- Moderation policy
- Linking policy
- Public Information Act (Public Information Act, Texas Government Code Chapter 552)
- Third-party website policy
- Intellectual property rights and ownership

The agency’s Public Social Media Policy should be available within the Social Media Tool, if possible, or on the agency’s official website.

See Public Policy Notification examples on page 8.

### 1. Accessibility

Agencies have a legal responsibility to ensure that all electronic and information resources are accessible and usable by people with the widest range of capabilities possible.

1 TAC 206 and 1 TAC 213 describe requirements regarding accessibility of state websites and all agency EIR. External Social Media Tools may or may not be compliant to 1 TAC 206/213; however, it is the agency’s responsibility to ensure that agency content is fully accessible. An agency should provide links to the external social media accessibility policies, make a good faith effort to remediate accessibility concerns for those websites, and gravitate to websites that respect EIR accessibility concerns. Ultimately, it is the agency’s responsibility to ensure social media content is fully accessible.

Accessibility requirements apply to the content on the Social Media Tool, not the features of the tool. Therefore, if an agency does not use an inaccessible feature, it is not in violation of accessibility requirements. If an agency uses an inaccessible feature, it should employ the following or similar alternatives to ensure full compliance with the law:

- Contact the social media provider to address accessibility issues
- Provide access to duplicated social media content on an accessible communication channel
- Direct users to an alternate version of the Social Media Tool that will provide accessible content

If the agency cannot implement a reasonable alternative solution and a business need to post inaccessible content remains, an exception must be obtained in accordance with 1 TAC 213. Exceptions still require the provision of an alternate method (for example, a toll-free number or a hard copy).

## 2. Privacy

Only public information may be posted on social media websites. To protect a citizen's privacy, the agency's Public Social Media Policy should instruct the public to exclude Personally Identifiable Information, Sensitive Personal Information, and any other personal information protected by law from social media communications.

For information regarding the difference between Personally Identifiable Information and Sensitive Personal Information, refer to the Definitions section.

There may be instances when Personally Identifiable Information is needed to serve the public. If appropriate, agencies should provide an alternate means of communication for the public to continue the conversation in a protected environment. An agency should define when Personally Identifiable Information will be deleted.

If Sensitive Personal Information or other confidential information is posted, the agency must remove it as soon as practically possible upon discovery. If the agency chooses to provide an explanation for the removal, the agency should reference the relevant section in its Public Social Media Policy. Other federal laws, rules and regulations may apply.

## 3. Open Records Requests

Open Records requests under the Texas Public Information Act for social media content must follow the agency's Open Records (or "Public Information") Requests Policy.

## 4. Records Retention

Content posted by the agency or the public on an agency's social media website is a state record (Government Code, Section 441.180(11)), and is subject to [State Records Retention requirements](#) in Government Code Chapter 441, Subchapter L, 441.180-205.

To manage compliance, agencies may consider common exceptions to State Records Retention Requirements in developing social media content strategy. Two common exceptions are

- **Duplicate content**, which is content that is duplicated from another source. (Government Code, Section 441.180(11))
- **Transitory information** is a record of “temporary usefulness that are not an integral part of a records series of an agency, that are not regularly filed within an agency’s recordkeeping system, and that are required only for a limited period of time for the completion of an action by an official or employee of the agency or in the preparation of an on-going records series.” (13 TAC 6.10 and 13 TAC 6.91(8))

An agency may be prohibited from deleting social media records, regardless of its established records retention policy, if the record is the subject of legal claims or actions (Government Code, Section 441.187). In addition, state and federal courts require the preservation of relevant records if a judicial or administrative action is reasonably foreseeable, even if such action is not yet initiated.

## 5. Security

In its usage of social media, an agency must comply with its own IT security policies, standards, and guidelines.

## 6. Third-Party Website Policies and Terms of Service

Before creating an account with a Social Media Tool, an agency should review and accept the provider’s terms of service. The decision to accept a provider’s terms of service is the responsibility of each agency—the state does not accept the terms on behalf of all state agencies. Each agency should review these terms and determine whether the risks stemming from the provider’s terms are acceptable.

Agencies may negotiate with a social media provider directly to obtain agency-specific terms of service. If an agency is able to negotiate more favorable terms, please notify [socialmedia@dir.texas.gov](mailto:socialmedia@dir.texas.gov).

If possible, an agency will inform users that the External Social Media Tool is hosted by a third party and the use of the website is governed by the social media provider’s own policies and by any additional policies as set forth by the agency or institution.

There is currently a nationwide effort led by the National Association of State Chief Information Officers (NASCIO) to negotiate a state and local government-specific terms of service with several popular social media providers. To date, Facebook has negotiated a special terms of service for state and local government entities that can be viewed [here](#).

YouTube has also agreed to terms for state government, but requires an application process through the State Chief Information Officer. Contact [socialmedia@dir.texas.gov](mailto:socialmedia@dir.texas.gov) for more information.

## 7. Moderation and Monitoring

An agency must first determine if it will allow public comments on their social media websites. If an agency allows public comments, then such content should be monitored regularly by the agency; however, the means and frequency by which an agency monitors its social media content is determined by the agency. Monitoring may be active or passive at the agency's discretion.

If an agency chooses to monitor, it is the agency's responsibility to determine the extent of moderation. There may be instances where an agency chooses to moderate posted content by deleting all or part of a post. The extent to which an agency limits or restricts speech requires careful consideration, including the application of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The criteria for removing, rejecting, or disavowing public content should be determined by each agency and communicated to the public in its Public Social Media Policy.

An agency is not required to provide an explanation for removing content, but may choose to do so. Removal of content does not preclude retention based on an agency's records retention policy.

## 8. Intellectual Property Rights and Ownership

Social media content may sometimes include photographs, audio, or video. An agency must ensure that it has the right to post all social media content and is not infringing on the intellectual property rights of others. Due to the functional nature of certain Social Media Tools, a Twitter "retweet" or Facebook "share" automatically provides attribution to the original post. [1 TAC 206.54\(1\)](#) provides rules regarding the "copying and use of information by website owners linking to state agency sites." Adherence to this rule will ensure an agency is compliant with requirements related to intellectual property rights and ownership.

Intellectual property rights of content provided by the public will be governed by federal copyright law, the terms of service of the social media provider, and the agency's copyright policies.

The Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) provides for a limitation of liability for alleged copyright infringement. To comply with the Online Copyright Infringement Liability Limitation Act of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act, agencies must include a notice of policy and contact information for its appointed copyright agent.

## 9. Employee Use

This section addresses agency employees' use of social media in connection with their agency position or as a part of their official job duties. When using social media in any fashion connected to their agency position or job duties, and when presenting oneself in a social media setting as an agency representative, agency employees must comply with applicable agency policies governing employee behavior and acceptable use of electronic and information resources.



All information posted on agency Social Media Tools by an employee under the above described conditions should adhere to the agency's professional conduct and employee ethics policies.

## 10. Linking

1 TAC 206 outlines the policies for linking to and from state agency websites, including Private Social Media Tools. Although Public Social Media Tools are not state websites, agencies are encouraged to adhere to 1 TAC 206 on their social media websites, when possible.

An agency should disclose a public-facing Linking Policy that extends to agency content on Social Media Tools.

## References

- [Texas Administrative Code, Title 1, Chapter 206](#)
- [Texas Administrative Code, Title 1, Chapter 213](#)
- [Texas Business and Commerce Code, Chapter 521](#)
- [Texas Government Code, Chapter 441, Subchapter L, 441.180-205](#)
- [Texas Government Code, 441.180 \(11\)](#)
- [Texas Government Code, 441.187](#)
- [Public Information Act, Government Code Chapter 552](#)
- [Copyright Act of 1976](#) (including the [Digital Millennium Copyright Act](#))

## Public Policy Notification – Agency Examples

### 1) University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio

#### Public Policy Notification

The Health Science Center recognizes the importance of communicating with the public online, including through social media. This document gives information to members of the public regarding the Health Science Center's use of online tools and social media, as required by State of Texas policies.

#### Privacy Notification

Posts and comments on this and other social media channels operated by the Health Science Center are public and may be viewed by all visitors. Therefore, visitors should be careful about posting any private or personally identifiable information and limit such information to the minimum necessary to communicate their message.

If you need to include private or personally identifiable information in your communications with the Health Science Center, please let us know that you'd like us to contact you privately and we will follow up with you by email, telephone, or other one-to-one communication.

Postings on Health Science Center social media channels that include sensitive personal information are subject to removal, unless the subject of the information has given express consent for the disclosure of that information.

#### Moderation Policy

The posts and comments on all Health Science Center social media channels will be monitored and moderated regularly.

A posting or comment may be removed from a Health Science Center social media channel if it

- is off-subject or out of context
- contains obscenity
- contains sensitive personal information
- contains offensive terms that target protected classes
- is threatening, harassing, or discriminatory
- incites or promotes violence or illegal activities
- contains information that could reasonably be construed to compromise public safety
- advertises or promotes a commercial product, service, or any entity or individual
- promotes or endorses political campaigns or candidates

Health Science Center employees who monitor and moderate content on social media channels are not required to provide an explanation for removing content, but may choose to do so.

## Linking Policy

Links from websites or social media channels affiliated with The UT Health Science Center at San Antonio to any other websites do not constitute or imply university endorsement of those sites, their content, or products and services associated with those sites.

Although social media tools are not clearly defined as state websites, individuals linking to or from University-related social media channels are strongly encouraged to adhere to 1 TAC 206.73 and SRRPUB11 from the Department of Information Resources when constructing those links.

## Third-Party Website Policy

The social media tools employed by the Health Science Center are hosted by third parties, and the use of those sites is governed by the social media providers' own policies, such as their respective privacy policies and terms of service.

Examples include

- Facebook – privacy policy and terms of service
- Flickr – privacy policy and terms of service
- Google+ – privacy policy and terms of service
- Tumblr – privacy policy and terms of service
- Twitter – privacy policy and terms of service
- YouTube – privacy policy and terms of service

## Intellectual Property Rights and Ownership

The UT Health Science Center at San Antonio respects the rights of all copyright holders, and therefore, it has adopted and implemented a policy that provides for the removal of material that infringes the rights of copyright holders. If you believe that your work has been copied in a way that constitutes copyright infringement, please provide the University's Copyright Agent the following information required by the Online Copyright Infringement Liability Limitation Act of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act, 17 U.S.C. 512:

- A physical or electronic signature of a person authorized to act on behalf of the owner of an exclusive right that is allegedly infringed;
- Identification of the copyright work claimed to have been infringed, or, if multiple copyrighted works at a single online site are covered by a single notification, a representative list of such works at that site;
- Identification of the material that is claimed to be infringing or to be the subject of infringing activity and that is to be removed or access to which is to be disabled, and information reasonably sufficient to permit us to locate the material;
- Information reasonably sufficient to permit us to contact the complaining party;
- A statement that the complaining party has a good-faith belief that use of the material in the manner complained of is not authorized by the copyright owner, its agent, or the law; and

- A statement that the information in the notification is accurate, and under penalty of perjury, that the complaining party is authorized to act on behalf of the owner of an exclusive right that is allegedly infringed.

For copyright inquiries please contact the University's Copyright Agent: [Gary Sertich](#), Office of Legal Affairs.

## 2) [Texas.gov Policies](#)

### Accessibility – Agency Examples

#### 1) Texas Department of Licensing and Registration (TDLR)

TDLR is committed to making its website accessible to all users. To make the site more accessible, we include several features designed to improve accessibility for users with disabilities. Some of these features are described below.

A descriptive text equivalent is provided for images and other non-text elements, aiding users who listen to the content of the site by using a screen reader, rather than reading the site. Skip tags are employed to allow readers to skip beyond redundant content, such as page headers. Clear and predictable navigation is provided throughout the website.

Major reports and other publications that are on the website are generally available in HTML or other accessible formats. Some reports and documents are available on the website as Adobe Acrobat PDF files. We are in the process of ensuring that legacy PDF documents are made accessible if possible, and that new PDF documents are published in an accessible format.

Formatting, functionality and development of content for the website is performed with the intention of conforming to the requirements of Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0.

The Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation is committed to making its website accessible according to the requirements found in 1 TAC 206/213. To improve the accessibility of our website, we test any major redesign with screen readers and other tools. The results of these reviews are incorporated into the website. We currently use a variety of industry-standard tools for site validation, and it is our goal to achieve the highest level of accessibility attainable.

TDLR welcomes comments on how to improve the site's accessibility for users with disabilities. If you use assistive technology and the format of any material on our website interferes with your ability to access the information, please contact [TDLR](#). To enable us to respond in a manner most helpful to you, please indicate the nature of your accessibility problem, the preferred format in which to receive the material, the web address of the requested material, and your contact information.

Additional information about accessibility programs in Texas is available from the [Governor's Committee on People with Disabilities](#).

## Records Retention – Agency Examples

### 1) Department of Information Resources (DIR)

Communications (messages, posts, photographs, videos, and other formats) submitted or received using Social Media Tools are considered public records and are subject to State Records Retention requirements. Social media communications will be classified as the record series titled “Social Networking Communications” as defined in the DIR Records Retention Schedule.

Suspension of Records Disposition (Legal Holds): Notwithstanding the record retention of content applicable to Social Media Tools, a state record may not be destroyed if any litigation, claim, negotiation, audit, open records request, administrative review, or other action involving the record is initiated before the expiration of a retention period for the record set by the Texas State Library and Archives Commission or in the approved records retention schedule of the agency until the completion of the action and the resolution of all issues that arise from the action, or until the expiration of the retention period, whichever is later (Texas Government Code (TGC), 441.187).

Content on a Social Media Tool that meets the TGC 441.180 (11) definition of a state record and is not a duplicate record, transitory, or retained elsewhere must be captured by the Administrator and maintained for the full retention period of the appropriate record series. The program area will be responsible for selecting the method of record archiving and purging subject to approval by the DIR Records Management Officer.

## Moderation and Monitoring – Agency Examples

### 1) Texas Workforce Commission (TWC)

To protect confidentiality, factuality, and avoid harassing or other inappropriate language or comments, all incoming posts will be monitored by designated TWC staff before posting. Comments that are in compliance with the terms issued above will not be edited for content, typos, spelling or grammatical errors.

When monitoring a social media site that allows posted comments, TWC will not publish comments that disregard agency social media site policy including those comments that

- are clearly off-topic;
- contain confidential or personal information;
- include copyright violations;
- include profanity, racist, sexist, or derogatory content;
- present partisan political views;
- endorse any type of commercial product or service;
- contain fraudulent or harassing material; or
- appear to be or contain any type of SPAM or disseminated-in-mass content.

The responsibility for comment review and approval will be granted to individuals authorized by the TWC Communications Department, the Director of External Relations, and the Executive Director.

## **2) Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation (TDLR)**

TDLR's social media initiative is an extension of its commitment to communicate openly with its customers in the way they prefer. The purpose of TDLR's social media pages is to facilitate conversations that benefit you and the agency alike.

While we encourage your participation on our social media pages, please keep your postings family friendly. We ask that you follow our posting guidelines. If you do not comply, your post will be removed.

- We do not allow graphic, obscene, explicit or racial comments or submissions, nor do we allow content that is abusive, hateful or that may be perceived as defamatory toward anyone or any organization, such as a licensee, an elected official and/or a TDLR employee.
- We do not allow solicitations or advertisements. This includes promotion or endorsement of any financial, commercial or non-governmental agency.
- We do not allow attempts to defame or defraud any financial, commercial or non-governmental agency.
- We do not allow postings that suggest or encourage illegal activity.
- We do not allow posts that could compromise TDLR investigations.
- You participate at your own risk, taking personal responsibility for your comments, your photos, your username and any information provided.
- Users who repeatedly violate the posting policy may be blocked from TDLR's Facebook page.

TDLR's social media pages are intended to make communication easier but they are not the appropriate venue for complaints about a specific individual, business or organization. We do not allow these types of complaints on TDLR's social media pages. Instead, please use these resources:

- Submit license violation complaints [here](#).
- Submit complaints about a specific TDLR employee, commissioner or advisory board member to TDLR's customer relations representative, Stephen Bruno, by phone at (512) 463-7574 or [email](#).

## **3) University of Houston (UH)**

UH is committed to fostering a learning environment that allows for freedoms of speech and expression in accordance with the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (See [MAPP 13.01.01 - Freedom of Expression](#)). Please be aware, however, that UH will not tolerate any activity or posting that loses First Amendment protection such as any unlawful, obscene (as commonly defined by applicable federal and Texas law), or defamatory activity or posting. UH reserves the right to remove any such posting without notice.

## Intellectual Property Rights and Ownership – Agency Examples

### 1) Teacher Retirement System of Texas (TRS)

All TRS employees shall comply with the rules regarding copying and use of information by website owners linking to state agency sites (1 TAC 206.54) as it pertains to protected intellectual property.

Authorized administrators may submit photographs, audio or video to TRS' social media presence. TRS must have the right to post the content. Intellectual property rights of content provided by the public will be governed by TRS' Terms of Service and Use Policy (For Copyright Protections) or the terms of services of the third-party social media provider.

TRS respects the rights of all copyright holders and has adopted and implemented a policy that provides for the termination in appropriate circumstances of users and account holders, including employees and authorized administrators, who repeatedly infringe the rights of copyright holders or violate this policy. TRS' Terms of Service and Use Policy (For Copyright Protections) is located on the TRS website.

### 2) Texas.gov

Any trademarks that appear on this site are the property of their respective owners who may or may not be affiliated with, connected to, or sponsored by Texas.gov.

Texas.gov respects the rights of all copyright holders, and therefore, Texas.gov has adopted and implemented a policy that provides for the termination in appropriate circumstances of users and account holders who infringe the rights of copyright holders. If you believe that your work has been copied in a way that constitutes copyright infringement, please provide Texas.gov's Copyright Agent the following information required by the Online Copyright Infringement Liability Limitation Act of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act, 17 U.S.C. 512:

1. A physical or electronic signature of a person authorized to act on behalf of the owner of an exclusive right that is allegedly infringed;
2. Identification of the copyright work claimed to have been infringed, or, if multiple copyrighted works at a single online site are covered by a single notification, a representative list of such works at that site;
3. Identification of the material that is claimed to be infringing or to be the subject of infringing activity and that is to be removed or access to which is to be disabled, and information reasonably sufficient to permit us to locate the material;
4. Information reasonably sufficient to permit us to contact the complaining party;
5. A statement that the complaining party has a good-faith belief that use of the material in the manner complained of is not authorized by the copyright owner, its agent, or the law; and
6. A statement that the information in the notification is accurate, and under penalty of perjury, that the complaining party is authorized to act on behalf of the owner of an exclusive right that is allegedly infringed.

For copyright inquiries please contact [Texas NICUSA, LLC](#).

## Employee Use – Agency Examples

### 1) Texas Workforce Commission (TWC)

Designated employees representing TWC must maintain a high level of ethical conduct and professional decorum. Individuals authorized by TWC to post on social media sites shall present information that is accurate, relevant and factual, following professional standards for grammar, spelling and clarity and must avoid jargon and obscure terminology, or acronyms that could discredit TWC.

TWC employees must recognize that content and messages posted on social media are public and official TWC communications. Social media usage must adhere to all other TWC communication policies, including news media policy, as defined in the TWC External Relations manual.

Employees may not use either department social media accounts or their own personal social media accounts to reveal confidential information obtained through their official responsibilities as an employee of TWC.

Individuals authorized by the agency to post official TWC information shall not

- post information directly related to ongoing investigations, negotiations, and/or matters that are confidential or privileged by law;
- lobby or post politically partisan comments;
- imply, or post information that would give an ordinary member of the public the impression, that the communication represents the views or positions of TWC unless expressly authorized to do so; or
- post information that
  - could reasonably be expected to generate controversy and/or disruption at TWC or the LWDBs;
  - impedes the general performance and operation of TWC and/or the LWDBs; or
  - affects working relationships necessary to the proper functioning of TWC and/or the LWDBs.

### 2) Teacher Retirement System of Texas (TRS)

All TRS employees are expected to use professional judgment and exercise caution regarding any external communications, including the use of TRS' social networking sites (see the TRS Staff External Communications Policy). Use of TRS information resources for the incidental personal use of social networking sites is permitted as authorized under the TRS Information Security Manual (ISM), Section 3.0. Definitions of certain non-permissible content such as that which is confidential or sensitive are also included in the ISM.

TRS employees may comment on TRS' social media presence with the following restrictions:

- Employees may post only public, factual information and other permissible content.
- TRS employees do not have to identify themselves as employees when commenting on TRS-related postings; however, if employees do identify themselves as a TRS employee, they



must also state that any opinion given is their own and does not, necessarily, represent the opinion of TRS.

- Because of their high visibility, TRS employees who are executive council (EC) members are discouraged from commenting on TRS-related postings as EC members may be perceived as speaking for the agency. EC members wishing to comment must first gain the approval of the executive director. Should the request and comment be approved, EC members must identify themselves as TRS employees and must state that any opinion given is their own and does not, necessarily, represent the opinion of TRS.

In addition to adhering to the restrictions on posting non-permissible content, as defined in this policy, TRS employees must comply with state law, which

- Prohibits any TRS employee from engaging in activities to advocate benefit increases or to advocate or influence legislative action or inaction regarding TRS matters.
- Requires confidential handling of member records. (See TRS Confidentiality Policy.)

### **3) Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS)**

Employees representing DFPS through social media outlets or participating in social media features on DFPS websites maintain a high level of ethical conduct and professional decorum. Failure to do so is grounds for revoking the privilege to participate in DFPS social media sites, blogs, or other social media features.

Information must be presented following professional standards for good grammar, spelling, brevity, clarity and accuracy, and avoid jargon, obscure terminology, or acronyms.

DFPS employees recognize that the content and messages they post on social media websites are public and may be cited as official DFPS statements. Social media is not used to circumvent other DFPS communication policies, including news media policy requirements.

DFPS employees may not publish information on DFPS social media sites that includes:

- Confidential information
- Copyright violations
- Profanity, racist, sexist, or derogatory content or comments
- Partisan political views
- Commercial endorsements or SPAM



## Social Media Content

Quick Links – [Internal Considerations](#) | [Collaboration](#) | [Message Types](#) | [Message Examples](#) | [Other Considerations](#)

Once an agency determines its social media strategy and adopts a comprehensive policy, the agency is ready to begin posting to social media channels. Sharing content through the use of social media should support the agency's mission and fit within the overall communications and outreach plan. Despite the criticality of a social media strategy and policy, it is the agency's ability to continually produce engaging, interesting, and relevant content to its audience that determines the success of the agency's efforts.

Social media is similar to other channels of communication and there are varying degrees to which social media content ties back to overall communications content:

- Direct repetition of existing communications
- Support and augment existing communications
- Original content related to communications strategy, such as
  - a personal opinion on an important issue
  - external articles that relate to business lines or program areas
  - fun or informal content to engage the audience

### Internal Considerations

Before using social media, an agency should determine how it will create and maintain content. Consider questions like the ones below to determine the approach to creating and maintaining content.

- *Who is the audience?*  
Many agencies have multiple divisions that serve a variety of customers. Does the agency want to focus on a specific segment, or take a broader approach that communicates with diverse stakeholders? See the *Account Management* section in the Social Media Strategy.
- *How frequently does the audience need to be reached to communicate the agency's message?*  
Consider seasonal activity, program schedules, initiatives, outreach campaigns, legislative calendar, etc.
- *Is there an "expiration date" for the message?*  
If so, make a plan to remove or replace it. Proactively manage date-sensitive content.
- *Does the agency expect a high level of engagement from its audience?*  
Be prepared with responses and time to participate in the conversation.
- *Who will monitor comments and responses?*
  - Identify key personnel who will assist in monitoring comments and drafting responses.
  - Identify personnel authorized to respond.

- Evaluate comments/responses to develop new content or manage current content.
- *How does the agency handle social media functions during off hours?*  
Emergencies and other important social media conversations may occur after business hours, so it is important to work out processes in advance.
- *Does the agency want employees to join in conversations from their personal accounts?*  
If so, make it clear within the agency what is acceptable and what is not. Sometimes, employee contributions in non-official roles can be more beneficial than what the official agency representative can say.
- *How does the agency reuse content across platforms?*  
Determine whether and how content will need to be tailored for each social media tool. Not all social media platforms are created equal. There may be a need to format content differently to keep it relevant across platforms and meet the various audiences' expectations.

## Agency Collaboration

Social media is social by nature and as such, agencies can benefit by creating their own social media network of similar agencies.

- Integrate with other state and local agencies.
  - Identify agencies with similar responsibilities, target audiences, or communication goals and share or augment their social media communications. Example: Public Utility Commission, Office of Public Utility Counsel, State Energy Conservation Office, and Railroad Commission all have interest in energy production and consumption.
  - Work together with similar agencies. Find out how similar agencies manage their social media content and work together to share the messages. Example: Texas Department of Transportation, Department of Public Safety, Governor's Office, and cities all have a role during hurricane season announcements and public safety.
- If an agency's mission is sometimes confused with that of another, establish a standard way to direct users to the proper agency.
  - It can be frustrating for the public to have their questions or concerns go unanswered because they reached the wrong agency or program area. Work with stakeholder agencies to come up with standard responses so the public is quickly pointed in the right direction.
  - If the user has a major complaint, consider giving the agency a courtesy call to provide context for the user's comments or complaints.
- Identify agencies with less obvious similarities, but whose messages are also of interest to your agency's target audiences. Example: when it comes to long term financial and wellness planning, the Employees Retirement System of Texas and the Department of Aging and Disability Services might share similar interests and customers.

- When possible, keep track of other agencies' social media accounts to stay informed of updates and review for potential content ideas.
- There may be times when citizens ask about a program or division from a different agency. Instead of telling them they have the wrong agency, try to redirect them to the right place.

## Types of Messages

Social media content can take many forms depending on the audience, message, and social media tool. This section provides an overview of the different types of messages. What each agency decides to use will depend on its social media strategies and communications plan.

### Push vs. Pull Messages

Consider when and where the agency will **use push vs. pull messaging**. Well-rounded social media content will include both types of messages.

- Pushing information out to the audience by distributing information, announcing updates, providing details, etc.
- Pulling responses from the audience through surveys, polls, requests for feedback, etc.

### Responses to Comments

Plan a strategy to **respond to comments**. Here are some things to consider:

- Tone – Decide what kind of tone to use on each social media site. Is it okay to be informal, playful, or witty? When should the message be serious and formal?
- Source – Cite any needed sources and include necessary links. When promoting links from other organizations, think about the perception of endorsing those websites. Even if the content is neutral, the appearance could still give a negative or misleading impression. Refer to the Linking section in the Social Media Guidelines for more detail. Examples of possible misleading perceptions include:
  - an article from a private company might be perceived as an endorsement, even if the article is neutral
  - an article that contains a criticism of an organization, project, or product may be perceived as an agreement to the assessment, even if it is not the main subject of the article
  - an article from a website with affiliations (political, religious, etc.) might be perceived as an endorsement of the affiliation, even if the content of the article is neutral
- Governance – Given the agency's staff and resources, how does the agency social media contact involve other agency staff to provide the most accurate responses? How soon can the agency respond and what is the process for approving the response?

## Negative Posts

Consider when and how the agency will respond to **negative comments and experiences** regarding the agency.

- Remember that people have a right to express their opinions.
- Negative comments might not require a response; however, it may be in the agency's best interest to correct facts or address a negative experience. This positive interaction can improve the agency's relationship with citizens.
- Remember, it is critical to have a public social media policy to establish guidelines for public comments and criteria for removing content/comments. Details are in the *Moderation and Monitoring* section of the Social Media Guidelines.
- Monitor the comments. Is the post bashing and degrading others? If the conversation is getting out of control, consider replying with the agency's policy regarding content. In extreme cases, consider deleting the post.
- Is the post ranting, joking, or satirical? Depending on the degree of offense, perhaps reply with the agency's content policy and/or delete the post.
- Is the post misguided? Does it present false information? Respond to incorrect statements with facts and consider offering offline contact information such as a telephone number, email address, or link to information on the agency's website.
- Is the post a result of a negative experience? Monitor the experience and consider responding to rectify the situation and offer a solution.
- Before removing posts, make sure the agency has a clear records retention policy for social media content. If the social media discussion could lead to a legal action, check with your legal counsel before deleting anything. Check the *Records Retention* section in the Social Media Guidelines.

## Planned vs. Spontaneous Content

When possible, agencies should plan posts in advance. Scheduling posts in advance is a great way for the agency to ensure it is producing fresh, up-to-date content that aligns with other communication channels. Advance planning reduces the stress of last-minute scrambles for content. Browse through agency calendars, events, and other agency-wide outlets to find material from a broad range of agency-related topics.

When there is a need to provide spontaneous content, it is important to have an established approval process to make sure the content is reviewed and verified in a timely manner. Instances may include:

- posting at a meeting, conference or other event in real time
- emergency or other unforeseen situation
- quick response to an inquiry or comment

- unexpected breaking news

## Message Examples

### "Push" Message Examples

Note: the following examples are all taken from Twitter. The nature of these message types can be used across all social media platforms when appropriate.

- Outreach Campaign Information
  - Texas Department of Public Safety: [\*Fill out your family emergency plan\*](#)
  - Texas Department of Family and Protective Services: [\*Reminder to "Watch Kids Around Water"\*](#)
  - Texas Department of Transportation: [\*Reduce drinking and driving with PASS \(Person Appointed to Stay Sober\)\*](#)
- Agency-Related News
  - Office of the Secretary of State: [\*Statistics for new business filings\*](#)
  - Texas State Board of Pharmacy: [\*Link to latest agency news summary\*](#)
  - Teacher Retirement System of Texas: [\*Watch webcast of board meeting\*](#)
- External News
 

External news postings of interest to the agency's audience offer a great opportunity for agencies to establish themselves as leaders in their industry.

  - Texas Department of Agriculture: [\*Eat and say "cheese"\*](#)
  - Texas Council on Developmental Disabilities: [\*Transition tip sheet for teens leaving high school\*](#)
  - The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston: [\*Heart problems in younger men\*](#)
- Public Service Announcements
  - Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts: [\*Change in Sales Tax Holiday\*](#)
  - Texas A&M Engineering Extension Service: [\*Teach older relatives how to text\*](#)
  - Public Utility Commission of Texas: [\*Mandatory 10-digit dialing for local calls\*](#)
- Cross Promotions
 

Promoting state and local government agencies with similar missions can be a great opportunity for building relationships.

  - Texas Animal Health Commission: [\*Protect your livestock during extreme heat situations\*](#)
  - Texas Commission on Environmental Quality: [\*TCEQ and TPWD team up\*](#)
  - Texas Veterans Commission: [\*Partnership with Workforce Commission on pilot program\*](#)
- Agency Photos and Videos
  - Cancer Prevention and Research Institute of Texas: [\*Health educators encourage people to get screened for cancer\*](#)
  - Texas Parks and Wildlife Department: [\*State parks photo contest winners\*](#)
  - The University of Texas at Austin: [\*U.S. Secretary of State visits UT center in Guatemala\*](#)

- Legislative Updates
  - Office of the Governor: [\*Governor's statement on senate bill\*](#)
  - Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission: [\*New craft bills signed by the Governor\*](#)
  - Texas Education Agency: [\*Commissioner's statement on signing of house bill\*](#)
- Award Announcements
  - Texas Commission of the Arts: [\*Congratulations to person honored by the Americans for the Arts\*](#)
  - Texas Office of the Attorney General: [\*Winner of the NAAG Best Brief award\*](#)
  - Texas Board of Professional Engineers: [\*Executive Director receives meritorious award\*](#)
- Employment Opportunities
  - Texas Department of Motor Vehicles: [\*Hiring web developers\*](#)
  - Texas Department of Information Resources: [\*Hiring project manager\*](#)
  - University of Houston: [\*Announcing alumni job fair/mixer\*](#)
- Fun posts
  - Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation: [\*Connection between NBA finals and TDLR\*](#)
  - Texas A&M University: [\*This day in A&M history\*](#)
  - Texas Tech University: [\*Make your own sand art bottle\*](#)

### "Pull" Message Examples

- Two-Way Communication
  - Texas Department of Transportation: *Engaging and educating followers with a quiz about recycling*
  - Texas Parks and Wildlife Department: *Respond to questions about wildlife*
  - The Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum: *Response to a question about free admission hours*
- Customer Service
  - Texas Department of Motor Vehicles: *Response to a question about a replacement license plate*
- User-Generated Content Relating to Agency
  - Texas Parks and Wildlife Department: *Featured park visitor's picture of a bird*

### Other Considerations

Make sure the agency Records Retention Policy addresses what needs to be retained for pull messages before gathering response from the audience. If the messages are transitory in nature, then the agency is not explicitly required to retain them. However, if the agency uses the information collected to conduct official agency business, such as making policy decisions, then the agency must have a schedule and a mechanism for retaining, reproducing, and disposing of this content. For more detail, refer to the *Records Retention* section in the Social Media Guidelines.

Also, legislation requires that electronic resources be accessible to persons with disabilities. If the content pulled from the audience is unique and not duplicated in any other agency communication, agencies must ensure these pull messages are compliant with accessibility requirements. For more detail, refer to the *Accessibility* section in the Social Media Guidelines.